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ABSTRACT

Student reaction to a one-semester course in educational research, a required course in the master's degree program in teacher education at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, was obtained through administration of a questionnaire from 1965 through 1973. Students most valued lecture and question sessions on writing style, form and organization, and computational procedures for research papers. Students least valued discussion of hypothetical research problems. Class discussion of individual projects was rated in between. It is suggested that students may have felt more comfortable with the more explicit or traditional type of presentation. An important value of the course is acquiring the tools to become more discriminating consumers of research. For most of the students, the expectation is to conduct comparatively little formal research in their professional roles in the schools. (SW)

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STUDENT REACTION TO COMPONENTS OF A GRADUATE SEMINAR IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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The need for and prevalence of some form of course dealing with the principles and procedures of research in education and allied disciplines for the student at roughly the beginning graduate level are fairly widespread. This situation has been documented or implied by the 1970 National Symposium for Professors of Educational Research[1], and by such authors as Best[2], Cornett[3], Drewry and Nunnery[4], Josephs[5], Marks[6], Mayo and Scarborough[7], Moriber[8], Reali and Shapiro[9], and Scott[10].

At Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, for several years students matriculated for a master's degree in the Teacher Education Program have been required to complete a one semester specified course in educational research after completing approximately two-thirds of their course requirements.[11] The course has been divided into numerous sections, each with an average of about 20 students, and the common requirements that it generally be conducted as a seminar and that it include the planning and execution of a minor investigation by each individual. The instructor thus possesses considerable latitude as to the content of his or her assigned section(s). The present study is based on data collected from the one section taught by the investigator in all but two of the regular semesters from the autumn of 1965 through the autumn of 1973 -- a total of 15 sections. A brief questionnaire devised and used by the investigator contained some items primarily pertinent to administrative matters at Brooklyn College.

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However, the major purpose of the study, which is of wider applicability, was to ascertain student reaction to the content components or basic activities of the course.

The seminar consisted of three major types of basic activities during the approximately one hour and forty minute weekly sessions. Consultation and discussion of each student's research project consisted of the individual outlining or presenting a progress report on his or her study and receiving comments, questions and suggestions from the instructor and classmates. The students' projects included the requirement of data collection and statistical analysis. A second major activity was lecture-question sessions and classroom work in writing style for research reports, the basic organizational considerations and form of research papers, and computational procedures and meaning of elementary level statistics needed for the projects. The third major component was the presentation for discussion of hypothetical research problems. These problems were planned to elicit understanding of the various factors involved in project design and measurement procedure. Depending on the nature of the problem, control of variables, control and placebo groups, inventory construction, item analysis, methods of reliability and validity, content analysis, pilot studies, random sampling,etc. were discussed. There was an approximately equal distribution of class time among these three major types of activities. In the questionnaire, the students were asked to rank these three components in terms of usefulness to them with a rank of 1 representing the major type of class activity that was most useful, a 2 the second most useful, and a 3 the activity that was least useful.

In the spring of 1971, the questionnaire was mailed to all students who had completed the seminar through the autumn 1970 semester. For the remaining six semesters the questionnaire was completed at the end of the last session of the course. All respondents had received their final grades prior to completing the form. Due to some mailed questionnaires for the early semesters being undeliverable, and absences on the concluding session of the seminar for the later ones, not all students were reached. Of a possible 305 individuals, 251 were contacted and of these 192 completed questionnaires were obtained for a return rate of 76.5 per cent.

As can be seen from the accompanying table, the lectures and classroom work were valued most and the discussion of hypothetical research problems least, with class discussion of individual projects in between. Each mean rank is significantly different from each other mean rank at the .01 level.

Ranking of Seminar Components

(N = 192)

Component	Mean	Standard deviation
Consultation and discussion of each person's specific project	1.98	.72
Lectures and classroom work in writing style, organization of a research paper, and statistics	1.47	.71
Discussion of hypothetical research problems	2.55	.64

It should be noted that the mean rank of 110 students in the sample who were elementary school teachers was compared to the mean rank of 57 individuals who were secondary school teachers for each of the three components. (The remaining 25 individuals consisted of other types of school personnel, full-time students, housewives, etc.) The differences between the means of the two types of teachers were almost nonexistent.

One major type of class activity often included by those teaching other sections of the course is critical review of assigned published research articles. This component appears to be a most worthwhile endeavor. However, in the limited class time, it was felt that the hypothetical research problems were possibly of more value. A similar opinion exists regarding in-class discussion of assigned textbook readings. Obviously, not all possible major types of classroom activities were included in the present study. The investigator has reason to believe that, especially in view of the roughly eight year span for the collection time of data, he is equally proficient in his treatment of each of the three course components. Of course, it is possible that some aspects of the seminar were handled better than others, and that rankings could have been influenced by differential instructor proficiency. The pattern of response was the same for those who had completed the questionnaire by mail as compared to those who had completed it in class.

As has been seen, a basic finding was that lecture-question sessions/ classroom work was the component of most usefulness to the students. These sessions included content that was substantially overlapped or paralleled by discussion of individual projects and hypothetical research problems.

It is thus suggested that the students may have felt more comfortable with the more explicit or traditional type of presentation. For most of them, the expectation is to conduct comparatively little formal research in their professional roles in the schools. An important value of the course is the opportunity to acquire the tools to become more discriminating consumers of research. Possibly the knowledge obtained through the less direct methods, even though presented in pertinent contexts for the research consumer purpose, is not viewed as sufficiently applicable when ranked against a more customary approach.

Footnotes

[1] Robert B. Ingle and William J. Gephart, "Introduction to Educational Inquiry: A Proposed Course Outline." (Developed from discussions and follow-up of the National Symposium of Professors of Educational Research: 1970.) Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, August 1971.

[2] Eugene E. Best, "The Classroom Teacher as Educational Researcher." The Independent School Bulletin, Vol. 30 (October 1970), pp. 37-38.

[3] Joe D. Cornett, "Teaching Educational Research." Improving College and University Teaching, Vol. 18 (Winter 1970), pp. 19-20.

[4] Galen H. Drewry and Michael Y. Nunnery, "The Place of Research in School Administrator Preparation." Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 43 (March 1962), pp. 248-250.

[5] Lois S. Josephs, "Research and the Training of Teachers." School Life, Vol. 46 (June 1964), pp. 12-13.

[6] Merle B. Marks, "Research: The Preservice Missing Link." The Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. 23 (Winter 1972), pp. 453-456.

[7] Selz C. Mayo and C. Cayce Scarborough, "Teaching Methods of Social Research." Improving College and University Teaching, Vol. 11 (Autumn 1963), pp. 228-230.

[8] George Moriber, "The Need to Study Educational Research." Contemporary Education, Vol. 42 (May 1971), pp. 290-291.

[9] Norma Reali and Bernard Shapiro, "More Research Courses! More Measurement Courses! More Statistics Courses! The Educational Forum, Vol. 36 (March 1972), pp. 406-407.

[10] Owen Scott, "Relative Effects of Four Types of Assignmen. on Competence in Research Consumership." The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 65 (December 1971), pp. 183-189.

[11] A new program sequence contains an expanded research course requirement for students entering in, and subsequent to, the autumn of 1975.